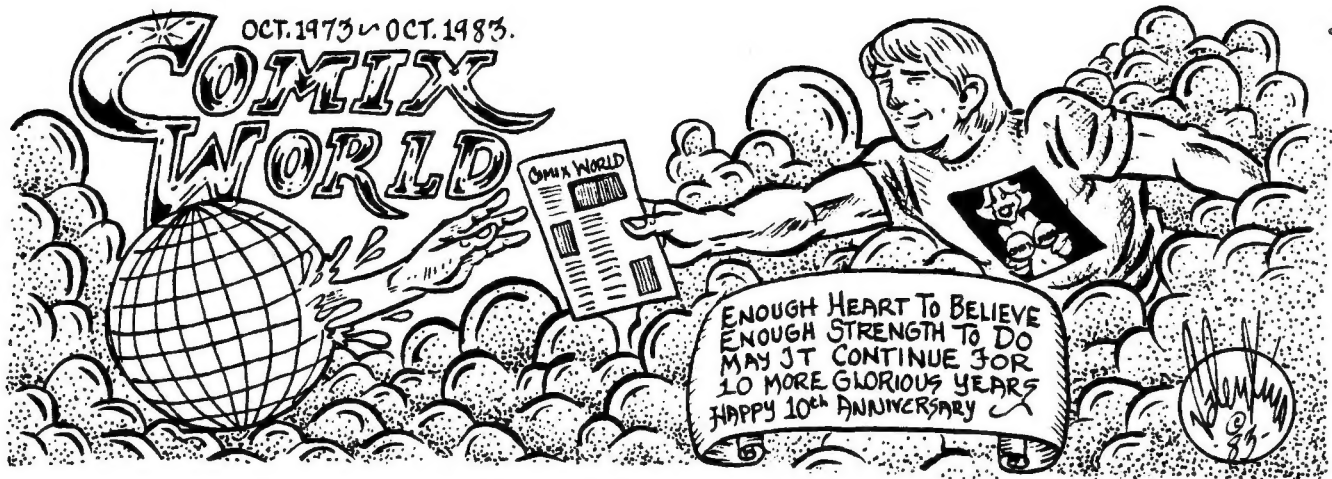




COMIX WORLD 227. December 1983. (C) Clay Geerdes. Box 7081, Berkeley, CA, 94707. All rights reserved. Logo by Valentino.

The following is the continuation of an interview I did with Clay Geerdes on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of COMIX WORLD. When we left off last issue, Clay had been discussing the various conflicts that tend to arise when producing a newsletter--specifically, the situation in which the critic likes someone's artwork but doesn't like the artist personally. Clay ended by saying that his way of dealing with this problem has been to mention all new releases in his column and to keep the personal level separate. Onwards...

-- Diana Schutz

DI: How can you keep personal feelings out of your writing? That strikes me as an almost impossible task, especially in the case of reviews, which can often be subjective.

CLAY: Well but, you see, I rarely review anything. I had various people, over the years, write review material for me and sometimes it worked out for a while and sometimes it didn't work out. You know, you wrote a few reviews. I just have never found anybody who was really enthusiastic and wanted to get in and do that regularly. I don't want to do it, so I don't do it. And I don't really have room to do it and I don't really have any interest in expanding the newsletter beyond its two sides--I don't really have any interest in doing that because the interest is not out there. Had I found, over the ten-year period, that there was a great deal of interest in the newsletter per se, it probably would have expanded on its own to become ten, twenty, thirty pages--whatever was required. But I didn't have the interest in expanding something, for instance, into magazine format when I could see that the basic interest was not out there in the first place, when the basic support wasn't there for this medium. The support wasn't there not only from the general readership, but it wasn't there from the publishers, from the artists themselves--because I have gotten, I would say, over the years, *minimum* amount of support from the artists and the publishers, for my newsletter. I've mostly had to pay all my own expenses, do all my own work, this sort of thing. I didn't, in other words, get any advertising unless I went and begged for it, and I don't like feeling like a beggar--or like a peddler. Everyone wants on the mailing list free. Or people always want to trade me; well, that's fine, but you see, I have plenty of books. I need a little capital because the printers won't trade me, so I have to have that capital, and I haven't found that kind of economic support out there. I've found pretty good support from my subscribers, but from the industry itself, I would say my support has been minimum. Never really very enthusiastic. Well, I have kind of mixed feelings about that.

DI: And yet, you have expanded COMIX WORLD in the sense

that--

CLAY: No, COMIX WORLD hasn't really gone through any kind of change. It's still pretty much what it was.

DI: --in the sense that you've moved beyond COMIX WORLD into a companion newsletter as well: COMIX WAVE.

CLAY: Yeah, but COMIX WAVE is a whole separate thing. COMIX WAVE represents the transition between underground and newave, and it really represents the fact that the underground artists are now middle-aged people, like myself. And the newavers are young guys in their late teens, early twenties, who are just getting started in comics, who have been stimulated by undergrounds to do it in the first place, to try to get in there and develop their own styles, so it's more or less a support medium for a new generation of cartoonists, and for a while I just tacked what they were doing onto COMIX WORLD, because I saw it--as Jay Kennedy does in the *Underground Price Guide*--as a continuation of the basic underground philosophy, that is, freedom of publication, the freedom to do your own thing in print.

DI: Do you see the newaves as having a future in the comics industry?

CLAY: Well, that brings up a complicated problem. Newave is not, basically, a commercially viable enterprise, and it never will be. Newave is small print runs, xerox-zines, digest-zines, more or less an outlet for creativity--which does not fit into existing patterns, either overground or underground.

DI: Do you think the little zines will perhaps become ultimately collectable?

CLAY: There are a lot of people collecting them now. Again, what are you going to do? The problems of collecting them are legion. Since they're coming from thousands of different places, since there are probably thousands of them--by now, I would say, there are probably 30 or 40 thousand of them, basically, all over the world--it would be an impossible kind of undertaking to think of them as collectable. I have a whole basement full of them! To answer your question: no, I don't think they're commercially viable. And no, I don't think they'll ever be commercially viable. I think they'll remain a training ground for young artists and a communication medium between young artists, because of course, now, they trade them among each other and they jam with each other and there are maybe 20 or 30 of us who are regularly doing little magazines and we all draw pictures for each other's magazines, and trade. So it's a network, a tightly-knit network of people who are doing comics and enjoying them. We're doing them for fun mainly and for a hobby and we're having a good time. Some of the people in our group are branching out and getting into other areas. I mean, some of our people will probably eventually wind up in the major companies--though that's not *my* goal and I don't ever want to wind

up at a major company. I have never even considered it. And it's not the goal of, well, Parry Holman or a lot of my other people. But, for some--like Valentino, it was his goal, and now he's connected and he's doing NORMALMAN with Aardvark-Vanaheim and will probably eventually get into Marvel and go on that route, because I think he wants to make a living in comics. What we're doing is not designed to make a living. It's designed for producing comics of all kinds. The Newaves started with one basic concept: that *anything* could be a comic book, and should be.

DI: You really believe that???

CLAY: Of course I do! I have made up personally over 200--and some titles--and they're all comic books, little eight-pagers. Why not? Why shouldn't they be? Of course I believe it! Sure. When I see something funny, I say "Why not? Let's do it." But things are changing a little bit now. I mean, it's not something that is without its limits. I have no idea what will happen with the little comics. I know that when something exists, something ultimately happens with it. I mean, it has to be dealt with. And the little books exist. They may become a fad or a craze or something eventually--I have no idea what will happen. If they do, then a lot of guys will realize a little return on their investment of time. But if they don't, so what? You see, there's very little loss. It's not like undergrounds, or what are now sub-Establishment companies like Pacific and First and what-not. They must have an enormous printing bill every month--they have to go through Sparta... In other words, comics to them are big business. The minis are little business. The minis are the Little Time--they're not the Big Time. An awful lot of people participate in them. There are over 170 artists that have done work in the minis. And of those artists, about 15 or 20 of them are established. They contribute to show their support or simply because it's a medium free of editorial control. I have letters in my files from a lot of people who read them and enjoy them.

DI: So Clay "Guru-des", after these last ten years, do you have any words of wisdom for your readers, any final words of wisdom?

CLAY: Final words? [Laughs] Well, I would like to see a lot more freedom in comics. I'd like to see a lot less formula and a lot more spontaneity. I'd like to see a lot more people get involved in newave comics, really. I'd like to see artists realize that, for instance, they need not wait two years to see their stuff in print. I mean, why not publish it now, get it out? You see, in the Newaves, you retain your own copyright; there are only a few copies printed; you trade them with your friends; the artwork is seen by some people. It doesn't have any effect whatsoever on publication elsewhere--you can still take the story and sell it to someone else for money, so it doesn't have any effect on that. The new companies are eventually going to need back-up material and I think a lot of the material that's being published in the minis and digest-zines will form good back-up material for these comics. Remember, there were a lot of comics in the '40s, like JOKER and GAY, that used filler material--they used panels, strips, all kinds of stuff, half-pages, full pages. There was a market for that kind of material, and studios produced it because not every magazine ran an even length: they needed an extra page here, or they didn't get a page of advertising there, so they needed a couple of strips there. Well, I think the mini artists can fulfill this kind of function for the new comics that are being published as well as they could have in the '40s. Logically, they're not going to get into the eastern comics because there's a club, a precedent, everything's established; but there isn't that kind of precedent at companies like First or Pacific or Comico--there's still an opportunity there for them to take new artists and print pages, half-pages, strips, and panels.

DI: Well, now that you've finished the first ten years of COMIX WORLD, do you expect to go for twenty?

CLAY: Doubtful. I'll keep doing a newsletter, but the concentration will be on COMIX WAVE, because that's where the interest and the energy are. COMIX WORLD will come out when there is something to put in it, some new underground comix. I could turn it into a nostalgia sheet and start doing retrospective stuff, but I'm not interested in doing that right now. If I am later, I will.

Thank you, Diana, for all this WORK, and thanks to all of you who have supported and contributed to COMIX WORLD over the past decade.

Those of you who would like to reflect over the past decade in print ought to write me over the holidays. I'll run some of the letters or parts of them when I resume publication in January. As is my custom, I will not mail during the Christmas season. -CLAY GEERDES

